



SENATOR

Phil Rockefeller

E-Newsletter - 23rd District, Bainbridge Island

[Web Site](#) | [Contact me](#) | [About the Legislature](#)

23rd Legislative District

January 28, 2011

Dear Neighbors,

I hope this e-newsletter finds you well. We have now wrapped up the third week of session. The highlights from this week are:

- Flexibility to school districts facing budget challenges
- Crime prevention and treatment saves money
- State fifth best for small business
- Strong calls for ferry reform
- Tax amnesty period starts Feb. 1
- Preserving ballot initiative integrity

Remember to check out the SDC [podcast](#) 'In the Loop' for a summary of the week's events or visit us on twitter [@WASenDemocrats](#). A tip for twitter users, follow [#waleg](#) to see what else people are saying about the Washington State Legislature!

Please contact my office with any ideas you have to address our state's budget crisis. As mentioned before, we must help each other in the ways we can. In my role as your state senator I will continue to fight hard for Kitsap County issues here in Olympia.

Sincerely,

23rd Legislative District

(360) 786-7644

rockefeller.phil@leg.wa.gov

www.senatedemocrats.wa.gov/senators/rockefeller/

Flexibility to school districts facing budget challenges

This week I introduced legislation to help school districts that have been hit hard by budget cuts due to less state aid. During the current school year they would have the option to seek the state Superintendent of Public Instruction's (SPI) approval of a school program with up to three fewer days (or the hourly equivalent) than the standard 180 days.

My seatmate, [Rep. Christine Rolfes, D-Bainbridge Island](#), sponsored [House Bill 1607](#) and I sponsored companion [Senate Bill 5511](#) that would temporarily empower SPI during the rest of the 2010-11 school year to grant school districts the exemption.

During the current state budget crisis, restructuring the required amount of school days can create local savings. Reducing hours of the remaining school year would help mitigate the impacts of unforeseen state funding reductions savings in utilities, transportation, and certain personnel costs.

Not every district will want or need to take advantage of this option. Those who choose to will submit an application for review to SPI.

In ordinary times I wouldn't consider seeking this authority but given the extraordinary fiscal problems regarding the 295 school districts, I believe local school districts may need flexibility on a case by case basis.

Crime prevention and treatment saves money

For 15 years, the Legislature has invested in a host of crime prevention and treatment programs to prevent adult and juvenile offenders from re-entering the system. A new study shows those investments are paying off — big time.

According to the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, the state today saves \$635 million *in each two-year budget*, thanks to reforms in treatment and prevention programs and sentencing.

Those investments have also led to a reduction in violent and serious crime. Over the last decade, overall crime has dropped by 22 percent; violent crime is down 11 percent; property crime is down 23 percent; and juvenile felonies have dropped by nearly 50 percent.

Today there are approximately 600 juveniles in the system, compared to 1,600 a decade ago. Research shows that, for juvenile offenders, functional family therapy can reduce the crime rate by 18 percent, saving the state \$27,000 per offender in corrections and victim costs. Aggression replacement training can reduce crime by another 9 percent, saving taxpayers \$11,200 per offender.

For adults, cognitive behavioral therapy is shown to reduce crime by 7 percent and save the state \$6,500 in corrections and victim costs. Education prison programs have been shown to reduce the crime rate another 8 percent, saving taxpayers \$7,200 per offender.

State fifth best for small business

Washington has been ranked the fifth best state in the nation for small business opportunities by The Street, an online publication whose index measures states on the basis of the costs of state government on small business and policies that boost competitiveness and growth.

Our state scored high for its lack of taxes on personal state income, corporate income and corporate capital gains and for our low electric rates. The index ranked Wyoming fourth best, Texas third, Nevada second and South Dakota first. Other ratings give our state similarly high marks. Now we need to work to be the very best — onto number one! You can [read more about it here](#).

Strong calls for ferry reform

One of our major efforts this session focuses on improving efficiency, on-time performance and eliminating wasteful practices in our state ferry system.

A recent Department of Transportation study of 2009-11 contracts showed ferry employees received about \$6.5 million worth of additional benefits compared to other general government employees. Legislation this year would address this by:

- prohibiting bargaining agreements from being more generous to ferry workers than to other public employees when it comes to annual leave accrual, types of leave, compensated holidays, travel time for commuting, meal compensation and other areas;

- giving managers more tools for managing performance, which in turn will make them more accountable for day-to-day ferry performance; and
- requiring more efficient and cost-effective ways of negotiating contracts and resolving injury claims and grievances. For instance, the legislation saves \$235,000 annually by abolishing the state Marine Employees Commission and moving employees under the Public Employee Relations Commission that oversees all other state employees.

The legislation has companion bills in the House and is sponsored by the chairs and ranking members of the transportation committees in both chambers. You can read more about the bills by clicking on these links:

[SB 5405](#), [SB 5406](#), [HB 1511](#), [HB 1512](#), [HB1352](#).

Tax amnesty period starts Feb. 1

Many businesses that are behind in taxes can pay their back taxes during a special amnesty period without having to pay penalties or interest between as a result of action taken during the special legislative session last December. I offered [two amendments](#) that were agreed to by House and Senate, designed to ensure that no one would use the program to game the system by deferring payments in anticipation of the amnesty period. The Association of Washington Business testified in strong support of my amendments. No other changes to the bill occurred in House or Senate. I had the privilege to move the bill forward on the floor of the Senate.

Businesses that are criminal defendants, face tax fraud charges or are in bankruptcy are not eligible for the amnesty program, which runs from Feb. 1 through April 30. The last day for applications is April 18. You can learn more at paymytax.org.

The idea behind the amnesty is to help businesses that are struggling due to circumstances beyond their control, particularly during these difficult economic times, so that they can remain taxpayers and employers today and in the future.

The state Department of Revenue projects that the program will help approximately 10,000 businesses and generate \$24.4 million in unpaid state taxes and \$3.9 million in unpaid local taxes.

Preserving ballot initiative integrity

Efforts to improve the integrity of the ballot initiative process died last year in the House, but we hope to pass them again this year and, this time, get them through the House and to the governor's desk.

Among other things, Senate Bill 5297 would require petition gatherers to sign their names on the backs of their petitions and prohibit anyone convicted of fraud, forgery or ID theft from gathering signatures in Washington for five years. You can [read more about it here](#).

If at any time you decide you no longer wish to receive updates from me, please go to <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/subscriptions/member.aspx?member=rockefeller> to remove your name from the list.

Washington Senate Democrats – SenateDemocrats.wa.gov